



**Testimony of Mark Barden, Managing Director, Sandy Hook Promise
before the Judiciary Committee
Re: H.B. 6355
3.5.21**

I would like to begin by thanking the committee, co-chairs Senator Winfield and Representative Stafstrom, as well as ranking members Senator Kissel and Representative Fishbein, for holding this important hearing.

My name is Mark Barden, and I am one of the founders and Managing Directors of Sandy Hook Promise. I am also father to James, Natalie, and Daniel. On December 14, 2012 my youngest son, my sweet little Daniel, was murdered in his first-grade classroom at Sandy Hook Elementary School. The pain my family has endured every day since Daniel was taken from us is impossible to fully convey to you.

In the weeks and months following the shooting, I began working with other family members whose loved ones were killed that day to find a way to prevent other parents from experiencing the senseless, horrific death of their child to gun violence. The result was Sandy Hook Promise, an organization committed to ending school shootings and creating a culture change that prevents violence. Stated differently, we seek to increase safety, especially that of students, in schools, homes, and communities.

Connecticut was the first state in the country to pass a risk warrant law in 1999. For over 20 years, this law has been an effective tool at preventing violence and saving lives in Connecticut. However, best practices related to the temporary transfer of firearms away from individuals at risk of harming themselves or others, has evolved over the past two decades.

It is time to update Connecticut's law to reflect these advances.

Since 1999, eighteen states and the District of Columbia have followed in Connecticut's footsteps; they have passed versions of risk warrant laws. The majority of these allow family and household members to file petitions for orders to temporarily separate an individual from a firearm. This shift makes practical and necessary sense, since these key individuals are best positioned to observe the warning signs that a loved one may be at risk of harming themselves or others.

Currently, however, Connecticut does not take this life-saving approach.

Rather, it only allows for members of law enforcement to act as the petitioner, creating a significant, although be it inadvertent, limitation on the opportunity to intervene.

At Sandy Hook Promise, we believe gun violence is preventable.



Specifically, we know that when we give people the tools to intervene - teach them to know the signs and how to get help for those at risk – lives can be saved. 70% of those who die by suicide tell someone of their plans or give some other type of warning sign and in 4 out of 5 school shootings, at least one other person had knowledge of the attacker's plan but failed to report it.

It is time to update Connecticut's risk warrant law to empower families. Let's give them a powerful tool that takes a balanced approach to firearm ownership, the wellness of those with access to firearms, and public safety. Let's ensure that when they see a potential tragedy in the making, they can take action to save lives.

Extreme risk protection orders are a critical violence prevention tool and Connecticut is safer because of it. But we can do more. It is time to update our current law to reflect best practices when it comes to the temporary transfer of firearms away from those who are on the brink of misusing it against themselves or others. I urge you to bring us one step closer to protecting all children in our state from gun violence.

I ask that the committee report house bill 6355 favorably. Thank you.